

Message Text

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47

ACTION IO-13

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SCCT-01 SSO-00 INRE-00

NSCE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 EB-07

FAA-00 DOTE-00 IOE-00 AF-08 /092 W
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O R 081425Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2204

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 4726

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, UG, IS

SUBJECT: PASSENGERS COMMENT ON AIR FRANCE HIJACKING

REF: (A) STATE 167095, (B) STATE 167345

1. DR. MOSHE PERES, WHO IS ABOUT TO GO TO THE U.S. FOR HIS
INTERNSHIP AT A HOSPITAL IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, TOLD
EMBOFF JULY 8 ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCES ON HIJACKED AF FLIGHT.

2. HE SAID THAT THE PLANE WAS LEFT COMPLETELY UNGUARDED AT
ATHENS AIRPORT AND THAT THE FOUR HIJACKERS RAN UP TO THE
PLANE AT THE LAST MINUTE CARRYING PACKAGES, CLIMBED ON
BOARD, AND LOOKED FOR SEATS. NOBODY WAS STANDING AT EITHER
THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS OR AT THE PLANE ENTRANCE TO CHALLENGE
THEM. THEY SIMPLY WALKED IN. HE DID NOT THINK THAT THEY
EVEN HAD BOARDING PASSES. ONCE ABOARD TWO OF THE
MEN STARTED TO DISTRIBUTE CANDY AND SOME DATES OUT OF A BIG
METAL BOX, EVIDENTLY TO REDUCE SUSPICION AMONG SOME OF THE
PASSENGERS. DR. PERES FELT THAT EVERYTHING HAD BEEN
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EXTREMELY LAX AND SUSPECTED THAT SOMEONE AT THE ATHENS

AIRPORT MUST HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH THE HIJACKERS; OTHERWISE, HOW COULD THEY HAVE GOTTEN ON TO THE RAMP? HE ALSO COMMENTED THAT THE DOOR OF THE PILOT'S CABIN WAS OPEN DURING THE FLIGHT, ENABLING THE HIJACKERS TO RUSH IN WITHOUT GIVING HIM TIME TO PUSH THE HIJACK WARNING BUTTON.

3. AS FAR AS HIS EXPERIENCE IN ENTEBBE WAS CONCERNED, DR. PERES CONFIRMED STORIES ALREADY REPORTED IN THE PRESS, THAT UGANDAN TROOPS LINED UP FORMING PASSAGE FOR PASSENGERS GETTING OFF. AT THAT TIME HIJACKERS WERE RELAXED TALKING, GREETING FRIENDS, BUT WITHOUT HOLDING ANY WEAPONS IN THEIR HANDS. PASSENGERS WERE MADE TO BELIEVE THAT THE FLIGHT WOULD RESUME IN A FEW HOURS AFTER REFUELING. THIS WAS AN OBVIOUS DECEPTION. AMIN WAS ASKED BY SOME PASSENGERS WHY HE DID NOT FREE THEM, BUT HE CLAIMED THAT THIS WAS IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE HIJACKERS HAD MINED THE BUILDING WITH EXPLOSIVES. AS EVIDENCE THAT UGANDANS MAY HAVE HAD FOREKNOWLEDGE OF PLANE'S ARRIVAL, DR. PERES CLAIMED THAT FOOD HAD BEEN PREPARED AS WELL AS TEMPORARY REST FACILITIES, AND THAT A UGANDAN DOCTOR AND TWO NURSES WERE STANDING BY TO GIVE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE. MOREOVER, UGANDAN TROOPS APPEARED TO PROVIDE THE PRINCIPAL GUARD OVER THE PASSENGERS. DURING THE FIRST NIGHT THERE WERE NO TERRORISTS IN SIGHT, AS UGANDAN TROOPS TOOK OVER WATCH DUTY, IN ORDER TO GIVE HIJACKERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REST.

4. DURING THE COURSE OF THE FLIGHT ONE OF THE HIJACKERS HAD TOLD DR. PERES THAT HIS GROUP HAD BEEN 72 HOURS WITHOUT SLEEP PRIOR TO BOARDING THE PLANE AND THAT BOTH ATHENS AND THE AIR FRANCE FLIGHT HAD BEEN CAREFULLY EARMARKED FOR THEIR OPERATION WHOSE CODE NAME WAS "HAIFA", REFERRING TO THE BIRTHPLACE OF ONE OF THE PALESTINIANS AMONG THE HIJACKERS.

5. BRIEFLY COMMENTING ON THE RESCUE OPERATION, DR. PERES SAID THAT AT THE TIME TWO TERRORISTS WERE GUARDING THE PASSENGERS. WHEN THE ISRAELIS LANDED THE GUARDS WERE COMPLETELY SURPRISED AND BEGAN SHOOTING AT THE INVADERS. HAD THEY TURNED THEIR GUNS ON THE PASSENGERS FIRST, THE OPERATION COULD HAVE ENDED IN A BLOODBATH.

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6. IN CONVERSATION WITH CONOFF JULY 8, URI DAVIDSON, AN ARTICULATE AND WELL-INFORMED ISRAELI ENGINEER, WHO WAS AMONG HOSTAGES IN ENTEBBE, CORROBORATED STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED TO PILOT OF AIR FRANCE PLANE THAT UGANDAN TROOPS DID NOT RPT NOT REPLACE HIJACKERS AS GUARDS. DAVIDSON, WHO IS A RESERVE OFFICER IN THE IDF, STATED THAT PRESENCE OF UGANDAN TROOPS MADE HIJACKERS' TASK CONSIDERABLY EASIER BUT, TO THE BEST

OF HIS KNOWLEDGE, HIJACKERS DID NOT COMPLETELY TURN OVER
GUARD DUTIES TO THE UGANDANS. NEVERTHELESS, DAVIDSON STATED
THAT UGANDAN COLLABORATION WITH HIJACKERS WAS OTHERWISE
COMPLETE AND ENTHUSIASTIC.
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